

Abstract

Geographies in a Life Science era: science, democracy and the space-times of biotechnology

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This paper takes up the challenge laid down in an editorial in *Transactions* a few years ago (Spencer and Whatmore, 2001) for geographers to engage intellectually with the life sciences and the pervasive social, economic and political implications of their hyper-inventiveness. It begins with a brief survey of the growing body of work addressing the challenge of 'putting life back into the discipline' and concerned variously with bio-politics, biotechnologies and biological resources. However, the main focus of the paper is an elaboration of the argument that the intellectual and political purchase of any such disciplinary investment resides not in the accommodation of the 'bio' within established theoretical or analytical frames of reference but in exploring the ways in which the register of 'life' disturbs and redirects geographical concepts and approaches ontologically and epistemologically.

This argument is developed and illustrated in three directions. (1) In terms of the longstanding focus of work in economic geography on the *space-times of innovation*. Biotechnologies are argued to have been instructive in realising a redistribution of the social attachments involved in 'new things' becoming fully-fledged social objects. (2) In terms of the crisis in *relations between science and democracy* that presses on the analytical attentions of political geographers. Biotechnologies are argued to have proved potent vehicles for generating new political practices and spaces through which scientific knowledge claims and devices are subject to public controversy. (3) In terms of *socio-cultural mappings of ethical responsibility* and the geographies of (dis)connectedness. Biotechnologies are argued to have been instrumental in rendering the bodily as an affective touchstone of 'posthumanist' modes of ethical thinking and feeling.

Spencer T. and S. Whatmore, 2001. Bio-geographies: putting some life back into the discipline. Editorial in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 26/2: 139-141.